



Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee

Minutes

Date: Feb 16th, 2022

Time: 7:15PM

Location: Via Zoom conference

Attendees: *Executive committee:* Christopher Tonkin (chair), Muris Kobaslija, Adam MacNeill, Doug Mayo-Wells (secretary), Scott Smith (TAC liaison)

Town of Arlington: Daniel Amstutz (Sr Transportation Planner), Jennifer Raitt (Director of Planning & Community Development)

Members of the public: Linda Epstein (resident), Len Greenberg, Mark Halliday, Roderick Holland (Member-at-large, Town Meeting precinct 7), Bernard McCormack

Reference materials:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/updated-guidance-on-holding-meetings-pursuant-to-the-act-extending-certain-covid-19-measures>

Email with bicycle education options from Galen Mook, Executive Director of MassBike:

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/59903>

Department of Planning & Community Development presentation for 02-16-22 meeting:

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/59901>

1. Greetings and Introductions, ground rules for online meetings.

Christopher Tonkin advised that the meeting is held remotely related to COVID-19 measures adopted during the State of Emergency. Tonkin notified attendees that Committee secretary Doug Mayo-Wells is taking minutes; the meeting is being recorded

for the purposes of verifying the minutes; and the recording will be deleted after the minutes are approved. Tonkin confirmed the committee members and others in attendance for the meeting.

2. Reappointment of Executive Board members

Tonkin: Planning to extend all current executive board members (except Doug Greenfield, who has indicated he wants to resign from the board). Later in the year we will appoint a new member to the board.

3. Approval of the outstanding minutes for previous meetings

Daniel Amstutz has submitted suggested edits for November minutes (which have not been approved), but other members have not had a chance to review. Doug Mayo-Wells will send updated draft minutes prior

4. BLUEbikes special appropriations warrant article discussion with Jenny Raitt

Jenny Raitt provides background: Arlington participates in the regional Bluebikes bike share program with other communities. Original contract leveraged a grant with other communities that significantly offset the cost, but that is winding down. Lyft, the owner-operator of Motivate/Bluebikes, has introduced additional costs, and to maintain current operations, as well as to expand the program to cover Arlington heights, will require additional funding. There is grant funding available to help cover expansion, but no local funding to cover operations and maintenance. Requested capital planning funds are but are not sufficient to cover operations maintenance).

A special appropriation to fund the Bluebikes program has been requested and is in a warrant article for this year's Town Meeting. However to pass Town Meeting we need to make a case for the benefits to the Town to participate in the regional network, as well as benefits to Town citizens (health, alternative transportation options, etc.).

The Finance Committee will be reviewing the appropriation request (meeting to be scheduled). A subgroup of ABAC might be helpful in preparing to present to the Finance Committee as well as Town Meeting.

Daniel Amstutz clarifies aspects of the contract with Motivate/Lyft: Payment of monthly operations and maintenance fees has been deferred for the two years, but going forward there will be monthly charges unless ridership exceeds a threshold of approx. 1750 trips/month. Our highest single month to date was 1500 trips in summer, so it is

unlikely that we could consistently achieve this ridership goal. The original municipalities (Cambridge, Boston, Somerville, Brookline) have a different structure, they have sponsorship funding from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, much higher ridership (on the order of 100,000/month) as well as ad revenue.

Arlington has sought other sources of funding, but State funding generally only covers capital expenses (adding new stations, but not operations/maintenance). Expanding the system will actually increase the operations costs, as those are based on the number of docks. There is some funding from Blue Cross for the additional municipalities (Arlington, Newton, Watertown, Everett, Revere, Chelsea), but it's not enough to cover operations for all the municipalities.

Based on the number of docks we have, the request for Town Meeting is \$100K to keep the program going for the next year.

Jenny Raitt mentions that Town Meeting starts on the last Monday in April, but it is not clear where this warrant article will be in the agenda, because finance items are often bundled. Possibly the 3rd night of Town Meeting (May 9).

Daniel Amstutz clarifies that there are some Community Connections funds from the Boston Metropolitan Planning Office (MPO) that can be used to expand the system, but the warrant article request would be just to cover operations. (There are some variables, if there is no expansion, operations costs will not increase as much and the \$100K could cover more than a year.)

Doug Mayo-Wells asks about the need to request funding annually as the Town is projected to enter a difficult financial period.

Jenny Raitt confirms that an override is expected for FY24, and securing funding next year will likely be more challenging. Could possibly explore other sources (sponsorship).

Adam MacNeil raises a concern about public funds supporting a for-profit private enterprise, even if the margin is thin, and suggests that this may be a hard sell. He mentions that he is a Town Meeting member.

Daniel Amstutz says that while he's not aware of the specifics of Motivate's profit margin, the charges are standard and applied equally to the communities, \$55 per dock per month. He notes that Arlington owns the stations.

Jenny Raitt clarifies that if we are unable to secure operating and maintenance funding, Arlington will no longer be able to participate in the Bluebikes regional network.

Scott Smith suggests that ABAC engage directly with the Finance Committee in March, April.

Jenny Raitt mentions that the warrant article has not been published yet, but that should happen within 1-2 days.

Scott Smith mentions that redistricting of the Town could have a significant impact on the makeup of Town Meeting, there may be some write-in candidates. He also suggests that it may be worth computing the cost per ride vs. MBTA to see if that helps to make a case for public benefit. He asks if it might actually be possible to achieve the 1750 trip/month threshold with a public campaign to increase use of the network.

Daniel Amstutz says that Newton has done some cost/ride calculations, and it's on the order of \$20/ride. Newtown has both lower ridership and more stations, so Arlington's costs might be half of that. Arlington is one of the highest performers among the additional municipalities, largely due to the Bikeway.

Scott Smith asks if we could remove or relocate lower-performing stations to reduce operating costs.

Daniel Amstutz has been looking at potential scenarios. Funding from Blue Cross could be on the order of \$18K, we would be substantially short of operating any stations without at least some funding from Town Meeting. Slower expansion of the system could create a large window of time to find alternate funding. Malden and Medford are also planning to enter the regional program in the next few months so there has been a lot of discussion and activity. There have been efforts to explore operational funding from the State, which has so far been a no, but it would be very unfortunate if Arlington had to cease operating Bluebike and would have impact on other communities.

Roderick Holland, Town Meeting member, mentions that O&M costs are very standard in contracts. He suggests an approach of "The Bluebike system is good, it's got a lot of support and users in the Town, people like it. If we want to continue, we need to pony up this O&M" He advises that no one will be surprised that these costs exist. He also questions whether \$100K may be too round a number, and suggests transparency in the budget, so that it's clear that it extends over a known period of time versus trying to stretch a lump sum across multiple years.

Doug Mayo-Wells wonders if it may be useful to emphasize that the Town has already invested significant capital funds to buy the stations, because it was perceived to have value to the Town, and that those funds will be wasted if the program is discontinued. He also wonders if it's possible to realistically project an increase in ridership to reach the 1750 trip/month threshold, so there would not be an indefinite need to fund O&M every year.

Daniel Amstutz mentions that although that 1750 trip/month threshold applies only to the current contract, and contracts are coming up for renewal. The entire system has to

be renewed or RFPs sent out in 2026 for it to continue. But there is a threshold tiering system where collective use across communities will reduce the monthly O&M, at 20K trips/month cost would be zero (likely because their own costs would be covered at that point).

We will also be doing community engagement to get feedback on the Bluebikes system, where we might expand, and more general questions about biking in Arlington, and will share the survey with ABAC.

Jennifer Raitt mentions that the \$100K includes not only the monthly operations fee but also winter storage removal/replacement.

Christopher Tonkin mentions that winter is likely to be an ongoing issue because people ride bikes less in winter no matter what. He suggests that Medford and Malden will likely be in a similar mode to Arlington as they are all municipalities that don't have population densities comparable to Cambridge or Boston. He wonders if we have data on how many riders are using Bluebikes in Arlington from other municipalities.

Daniel Amstutz says he can investigate that, although the data is not straightforwardly available.

Muris Kobaslija asks how the committee can help; Jennifer Raitt suggests that a subcommittee to work with the Planning Department would be beneficial, as well as the committee's endorsement of the warrant article. There may be a hearing with the Select Board as well.

Roderick Holland, Muris Kobaslija, Doug Mayo-Wells volunteer to serve on a subcommittee.

Scott Smith moves that the committee affirm its support of a warrant article to fund the program: "ABAC supports the Bluebikes program in Town and supports maintaining and operating it in future years."

Christopher Tonkin seconds; roll call vote is taken

Motion carries, none opposed

Roderick Holland raises the point that payments to vendors for operation and maintenance services are normal practice.

Daniel Amstutz mentions that the original contract has guard rails limiting the amount by which fees can be increased.

Christopher Tonkin mentions the impact of the pandemic on ridership.

5. Report from COBWEB Officer.

No officer was able to attend.

6. TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) report

Scott Smith mentions that a vote regarding the private way was deferred due to issues unrelated to bikes.

Christopher Tonkin clarifies that Washington is the private way which provides access from the Bikeway to Brattle street.

The proposal is to make Washington St one-way for motor vehicles but continue to allow two-way bicycle traffic, and there is discussion about appropriate signage.

7. Tour of Arlington for 2022

Christopher Tonkin provides context, ABAC has in the past run yearly family-friendly tours of the flatter parts of Arlington and neighboring municipalities, featuring noteworthy bicycle infrastructure, open spaces, and points of historical interest, various routes have been used. These were canceled in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic.

Scott Smith advises that this is tentatively scheduled for May 22. He also mentions a knowledgeable resource for history of the Alewife Brook Reservation, if that is included on the tour.

8. Bikes not Bombs bike collection event at the DPW on April 30

Recycling Coordinator Charlotte Milan is organizing a Bikes not Bombs collection event at DPW and requested ABAC's involvement as well as a COBWEB officer.

Daniel Amstutz notes that there will be more collection events throughout the year, but this is during Eco Week/close to Earth Day, and a good opportunity to promote/inform about projects like the Minuteman Bikeway planning project and the Mystic River to the Bikeway connection project.

9. Mass Ave/Appleton intersection, movement of the traffic bollards

The bollards are being moved in the morning, and traffic wardens have to reposition. This is not related to snow removal operations. Police are aware and are investigating.

10. Development of new rubric for road markings, bike lanes with and without protection

The original meeting to discuss this has been rescheduled due to illness; nothing to report at this time.

11. Pilot project for bike classes at the Gibbs School

See: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/59903>

Scott Smith reports that he has communicated with Laura Swan (TAC chair and School Committee representative), Safe Routes to School coordinator Judy Crocker, and Gibbs school principal Fabienne Pierre-Maxwell. Need to follow up.

Christopher Tonkin confirms that almost exactly \$3,000 is available to initially fund the program. The goal is to plant the seed for ongoing bike education programs in Town.

Daniel Amstutz mentions, per Galen Mook of Mass Bike, that there are several options available, not all of which would be at Gibbs.

12. Bikeway book - suggestion from Lauren Heffernon. Arlington or Tri-town working group?

Christopher Tonkin describes the proposal as a website where people could take photographs of the bikeway, people on the bikeway, as an ongoing art project. Next step is to contact Arlington Center for the Arts to explore options.

Doug Mayo-Wells mentions that user-submitted photographs creates an ongoing need for someone to moderate and ensure inappropriate images are not shared.

13. General updates from Daniel

See: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/59901>

a. Minuteman Bikeway Planning Project update

The initial conditions report has been completed and will be posted in the next few days.

The next public meeting is March 2nd. The contractor, Kittelson & Associates, will provide an update, including analysis of the survey (for which over 1500 responses were received), draft recommendations, and breakout sessions concerning potential improvements to waysides and trailheads. (Community Preservation Act funds were applied to this specific part of the project.)

Kittelson & Associates is also looking at design approaches to manage speed and user conflicts, as well as communicating etiquette for path use. An appendix to the existing conditions report deals specifically with the bridge over Alewife Brook by Yates pond.

b. Mystic River to Bikeway feasibility study update

See: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/Home/Components/News/News/11771/3715>

A public meeting on January 26 was attended by more than 100 individuals and more than 500 responses were received to the survey that closed recently. The recording and presentation can be viewed at the news item link. This is a fast moving project, the existing conditions report should be complete by the end of month, and analysis of the survey data will follow. The contractor, Toole Design Group will be putting together a focus group including representation from Medford, Arlington, possibly Somerville. Have been working with Mystic River Watershed Association to identify participants. The next public meeting should be at the end of March, and may have some proposal concepts for route and intersection. This project will conclude by June 30.

14. Tales from the Bikeway, matters arising from the Bikeway e.g. encroachment and center line markings.

Muris Kobaslija and Doug Mayo-Wells raise concerns about a dangerous gap in the Bikeway in the granite marker on the line between Arlington and Cambridge (near Yates Pond/just North of Alewife Station and south of the wooden bridge over Alewife Brook). The issue has been raised with the Town and with Cambridge, and closed with guidance to contact DCR. No response has been received after a month.

It is acknowledged that the jurisdiction is complicated, MBTA owns the right-of-way, and the marker is within the Alewife Brook Reservation.

Daniel Amstutz mentions that the Minuteman Bikeway Planning project will include recommendations about closer coordination with Cambridge on issues such as this.

Action item: Muris Kobaslija, Adam MacNeill, and Doug Mayo-Wells will contact Representative Rogers

15. Tracking "Scary Moments" as in Cambridge

See: <https://www.cambridgebikesafety.org/2018/01/21/scary-moments-project>
and

<http://thecreativeexchange.org/projects/near-miss-project.html>

Scott Smith is not in favor of doing something similar in Arlington, it may serve to discourage riders.

Daniel Amstutz observes that It might be interesting to have a mechanism to collect anecdotal data about near misses as well as crashes, but not necessarily share the details publicly. He mentions the "Near Miss Project" as another point of reference.

Action item: Christopher Tonkin will consider with Scott Smith what data it might be helpful to capture, where it might be hosted/how we might publicize it, and determine if it is something ABAC should pursue at this time.

16. Bikeway trash pickup

Tentatively scheduled for Sunday April 24th, to coincide with Eco week.

Action item: Christopher Tonkin will contact recycling coordinator Charlotte Milan re: arranging for collected trash to be picked up.

17. Other Business

Daniel Amstutz mentions that the Board of Health is lifting the indoor mask mandate. Town staff will continue to wear masks for at least another week. April 1 is the deadline for meetings to be held online, barring any legislative changes at the State level to allow that to continue. It is unclear whether ABAC may return to in-person meetings in April.

It is clarified that if a quorum is established by in-person attendees, remote participation in the meeting is acceptable, but hybrid meetings represent significant logistical challenges. There is a commission in Town studying this issue.

Scott Smith moves to adjourn

Doug Mayo-Wells seconds; motion carries, none opposed

Adjourned